

# Report

## Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

### ■ 1.0 Site Description

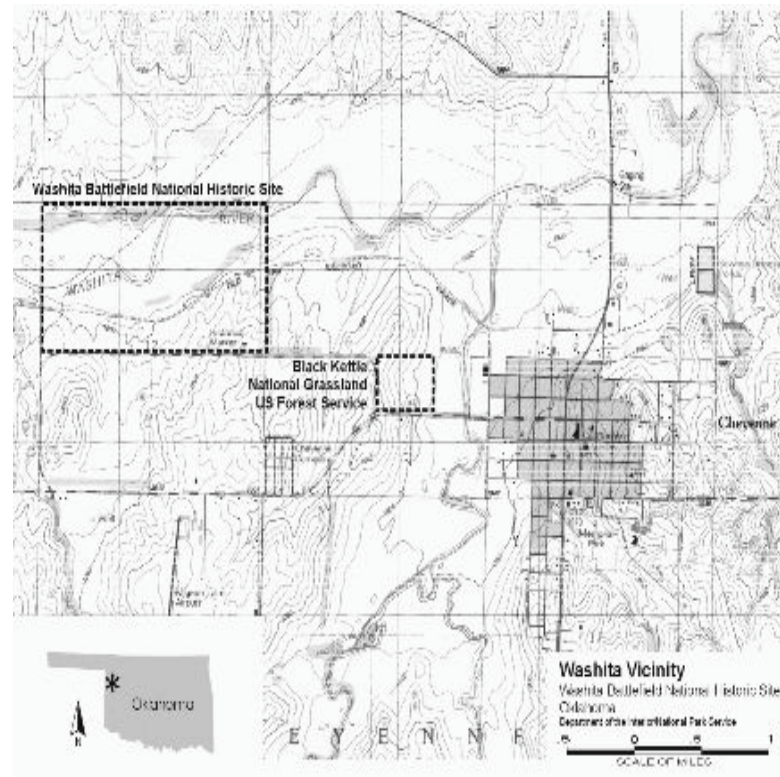


Washita Battlefield National Historic Site (NHS) protects and interprets the site of the Southern Cheyenne village of Peace Chief Black Kettle. The area was recognized as a location of national significance by being designated a national historic landmark in 1965. The NHS was established in 1996, and grew to its present size of 300 acres 1997 when private donors and the state of Oklahoma purchased most of the site and donated it to the NPS.

The site is located approximately 140 miles west of Oklahoma City near the town of Cheyenne, Oklahoma (See Figure 1). The nearest major access route, Interstate 40, is about 27 miles south of the site. State Route 47 forms the southern boundary of the NHS. The NPS is responsible for overall site management, with the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes and the state of Oklahoma serving as partners in overall site development.

Given the recent formation of the NHS, efforts have just recently begun to develop a General Management Plan (GMP). Plan development is being guided by three management principles:

- Recognize the attack by Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry on the Cheyenne encampment of Chief Black Kettle as a nationally significant element of the United States government Indian policy;
- Recognize the struggles of the Cheyenne and other Southern Great Plains tribes to maintain control of their traditional homelands; and
- Protect, preserve, and interpret the cultural and natural resources of the NHS through collaborative efforts of the United States government and the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribe.

**Figure 1. Location of Washita Battlefield National Historic Site**

Once the GMP is completed in 2001, the NHS will begin identifying more specific development and management actions through items such as a *Resources Management Plan* and a *Comprehensive Interpretive Plan*. At the current time, park management has not given detailed attention to transportation issues as part of GMP development; transportation issues will be addressed in subsequent planning efforts several years in the future.

The NHS currently has a small overlook at the battlefield site. The overlook includes a historical plaque, picnic tables, a self-guided trail, and a vehicle parking area. The NHS does not have an official visitor center either on-site or off-site. However, the Black Kettle Museum in Cheyenne, which is located about two miles east of the NHS, serves as an unofficial visitor contact station and administrative center for the NHS. The museum is operated by the Oklahoma Historical Society and provides interpretive exhibits for the battlefield.

Due to the NHS' relatively recent formation, there has not been an adequate opportunity to gather comprehensive visitation statistics and develop detailed "profiles" of typical visitors. In 1998, the NHS received about 7,000 visitors, predominately in the spring and summer months. Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday are the busiest days, with early afternoon being the busiest visitation time. Based on experience to date, visitors spend an average of 45 to 60 minutes at the museum and battlefield; NHS management expects this time to increase over the next several months as new interpretive displays are added at the museum.

Visitation logs at the museum indicate that visitors have come from all 50 states and 38 foreign countries. NHS management estimates that about one-half of all visitors are from adjacent areas of Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas. Management has also noted a preponderance of families in the summer months, with proportionately more middle-aged and elderly visitors (including senior citizen bus tours) at other times.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Nearly all visitors access the NHS by either private auto or tour bus. A fair number of these visitors combine their trip to Washita with driving tours of other historical sites in the area such as Native American grounds and the Route 66 corridor. Both the museum and battlefield have parking areas that are sufficient for current activities and visitation levels. NHS managers noted that some problems arise with buses and recreational vehicles at the battlefield site due to parking lot configuration.

NHS visitors also use their private auto and or bus to travel between the museum and battlefield. The distance between these activity centers is too large for walking. Also, the NPS has not tried or even considered a shuttle service between the activity centers since the NHS is relatively new and visitation levels are low and dispersed throughout the day.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Based on experience to date and projected visitation patterns, current NPS management at Washita Battlefield does not foresee any near-term or long-term need for public funds to build or maintain Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) or services.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The GMP process is currently considering four alternative development concepts. Due to the broad nature of a GMP process, specific transportation proposals have not been developed to date. More specific proposals will not likely be developed until future planning efforts several years in the future.

Three of the GMP concepts (including the “no-build” alternative) would have a visitor contact station at a separate location from the battlefield. Park management is not currently contemplating any type of ATS between these two separate facilities. Low demand, dispersed visitation patterns, the nature of visitor’s trips, and the lack of major driving/parking constraints would tend to make an ATS system an unattractive option for visitors. Furthermore, on-site shuttles at the battlefield would be incompatible with the historical

nature of the site, and would likely be unnecessary given the compact nature of the battlefield.

The fourth concept would place an NHS visitor center at the battlefield. Under this concept, all on-site activities would involve walking. On-site shuttles would be incompatible with the historical nature of the site, and would likely be unnecessary given the compact nature of the NHS.

NHS managers expect that new parking facilities that might be included with any of the build alternatives would essentially maintain the current capacity. The parking areas would be reconfigured to better accommodate recreational vehicles.

Given the remote location of the NHS and projected visitation patterns, it is also likely that an “off-site” ATS between the NHS and a remote location or town is not financially or operationally feasible. Based on experience to date, visitors tend to access the NHS from long distances in different directions. There is no central access point or major generator near the site. Also, many visitors go to Washita Battlefield as part of a recreational trip **through** the area, rather than beginning and ending their trip from the same location.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

*Washita Battlefield General Management Plan – Newsletter #1, June 1999.*

*Washita Battlefield General Management Plan – Newsletter #2, October 1999.*

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Sarah Craighead, Superintendent, Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

Steve Black, Chief Interpretive Historian, Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

Curt Foot, Resource Management Specialist, Washita Battlefield National Historic Site